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THE
INFLUENCE
OF
BIBLE SOCIETIES,
ON THE
TEMPORAL NECESSITIES
OF
THE POOR.

BY THOMAS CHALMERS, D.D.

ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF GLASGOW.

FOURTH EDITION.

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ARGUMENT.

1. *The Objection stated.*—2. *The Radical Answer to it.*—3. *But the Objection is not true in point of fact.*—4. *A former act of charity does not exempt from the obligation of a new act, if it can be afforded.*—5. *Estimate of the encroachment made by the Bible Society upon the funds of the country.*—6. *A Subscriber to the Bible Society does not give less to the Poor on that account.*—7. *Evidence for the truth of this assertion.*—8. *And explanation of its principle.* (1.) *The ability for other acts of charity nearly as entire as before.*—9. (2.) *And the disposition greater.*—10. *Poverty is better kept under by a preventive, than by a positive treatment.*—11. *Exemplified in Scotland.*—12. *The Bible Society has a strong preventive operation.*—13. *And therefore promotes the secular interests of the Poor.*—14. *The argument carried down to the case of Penny Societies.*—15. *Difficulty in the exposition of the argument.*—16. *The effects of a charitable endowment in a Parish pernicious to the Poor.*—17. *By inducing a dependence upon it.*—18. *And stripping them of their industrious habits.*—19. *The effects of a Bible Association are in an opposite direction to those of a charitable endowment.*—20. *And it stands completely free of all the objections to which a tax is liable.*—21. *A Bible Association gives dignity to the Poor.*—22. *And a delicate reluctance to pauperism.*—23. *The shame of pauperism is the best defence against*

it.—24. How a Bible Association augments this feeling.—25. By dignifying the Poor.—26. And adding to the Influence of Bible Principles.—27. Exemplified in the humblest situation.—28. The progress of these Associations in the country.—29. Compared with other Associations for the relief of temporal necessities.—30. The more salutary influence of Bible Associations.—31. And how they counteract the pernicious influence of other charities.—32. It is best to confide the secular relief of the Poor to individual benevolence.—33. And a Bible Association both augments and enlightens this principle.

ON THE
INFLUENCE
OF
BIBLE SOCIETIES, &c.

1. **WITHOUT** entering into the positive claims of the Bible Society upon the generosity of the public, I shall endeavour to do away an objection which meets us at the very outset of every attempt to raise a subscription, or to found an institution in its favour. The secular necessities of the poor are brought into competition with it, and every shilling given to the Bible Society is represented as an encroachment upon that fund which was before allocated to the relief of poverty.

2. Admitting the fact stated in the objection to be true, we have an answer in readiness for it. If the Bible Society accomplish its professed object, which is, to make those who were before ignorant of the Bible better acquainted with it, then the advantage given more than atones for the loss sus-

tained. We stand upon the high ground, that eternity is longer than time, and the unfading enjoyments of the one a boon more valuable than the perishable enjoyments of the other. Money is sometimes expended, for the idle purpose of amusing the poor by the gratuitous exhibition of a spectacle or show. It is a far wiser distribution of the money, when it is transferred from this object to the higher and more useful objects of feeding those among them who are hungry, clothing those among them who are naked, and paying for medicine, or attendance, to those among them, who are sick. We make bold to say, that if money for the purpose could be got from no other quarter, it would be a wiser distribution still to withdraw it from the objects last mentioned, to the supreme object of paying for the knowledge of religion to those among them who are ignorant; and, at the hazard of being execrated by many, we do not hesitate to affirm, that it is better for the poor to be worse fed and worse clothed, than that they should be left ignorant of those Scriptures, which are able to make them wise unto salvation through the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

3. But the statement contained in the objection is not true. It seems to go upon the supposition, that the fund for relieving the temporal wants of the poor is the only fund which exists in the country; and that when any new object of benevolence

is started, there is no other fund to which we can repair for the requisite expenses. But there are other funds in the country. There is a prodigious fund for the maintenance of Government, nor do we wish that fund to be encroached upon by a single farthing. There is a fund, out of which the people of the land are provided in the necessities of life; and before we incur the odium of trenching upon necessities, let us first inquire, if there be no other fund in existence. Go then to all who are elevated above the class of mere labourers, and you will find in their possession a fund, out of which they are provided with what are commonly called the superfluities of life. We do not dispute their right to these superfluities, nor do we deny the quantity of pleasure which lies in the enjoyment of them. We only state the existence of such a fund, and that by a trifling act of self-denial, on the part of those who possess it, we could obtain all that we are pleading for. It is a little hard that the competition should be struck betwixt the fund of the Bible Society and the fund for relieving the temporal wants of the poor, while the far larger and more transferable fund for superfluities is left out of consideration entirely, and suffered to remain an untouched and unimpaired quantity. In this way, the odium of hostility to the poor is fastened upon those who are labouring for their most substantial interests, while a set of men who ne-

glect the immortality of the poor, and would leave their souls to perish, are suffered to sheer off with the credit of all the finer sympathies of our nature.

4. To whom much is given, of them much will be required. Whatever be your former liberalities in another direction, when a new and likely direction of benevolence is pointed out, the question still comes back upon you, What have you to spare? If there be a remainder left, it is by the extent of this remainder that you will be judged; and it is not right to set the claims of the Bible Society against the secular necessities of the poor, while means so ample are left, that the true way of instituting the competition is, to set these claims against some personal gratification which it is in your power to abandon. Have a care, lest, with the language of philanthropy in your mouth, you shall be found guilty of the cruelest indifference to the true welfare of the species, and lest the discerners of your heart shall perceive how it prefers some sordid indulgence of its own to the dearest interests of those around you.

5. But let me not put to hazard the prosperity of our cause, by resting it on a standard of charity far too elevated for the general practice of the times. Let us now drop our abstract reasoning upon the respective funds, and come to an actual specification of their quantities. The truth is, that

the fund for the Bible Society is so very small, that it is not entitled to make its appearance in any abstract argument whatever ; and were it not to do away even the shadow of an objection, we would have been ashamed to have thrown the argument into the language of general discussion. What shall we think of the objection when told, that the whole yearly revenue of the Bible Society, as derived from the contributions of those who support it, does not amount to a halfpenny per month from each householder in Britain and Ireland ? Can this be considered as a serious invasion upon any one fund allotted to other destinations ; and shall the most splendid and promising enterprise that ever benevolence was engaged in be arrested upon an objection so fanciful ? We do not want to oppress any individual by the extravagance of our demands. It is not in great sums, but in the combination of littles, that our strength lies. It is the power of combination which resolves the mystery. Great has been the progress and activity of the Bible Society since its first institution. All we want is, that this rate of activity be kept up and extended. The above statement will convince the reader that there is ample room for the extension. The whole fund for the secular wants of the poor may be left untouched, and, as to the fund for luxuries, the revenue of the Bible Society may be augmented a hundred-fold before this fund is sensibly encroach-

ed upon. The veriest crumbs and sweepings of extravagance would suffice us ; and it will be long, and very long, before any invasion of ours upon this fund shall give rise to any perceivable abridgment of luxury, or have the weight of a straw upon the general style and establishment of families.

6. But there is still another way of meeting the objection. Let us come immediately to a question upon the point of fact. Does a man, on becoming a subscriber to the Bible Society, give less to the secular wants of the poor than he did formerly ? It is true, there is a difficulty in the way of obtaining an answer to this question. He who knows best what answer to give, will be the last to proclaim it. In as far as the subscribers themselves are concerned, we must leave the answer to their own experience, and sure we are that that experience will not be against us. But it is not from this quarter that we can expect to obtain the wished-for information. The benevolence of an individual does not stand out to the eye of the public. The knowledge of its operations is confined to the little neighbourhood within which it expatiates. It is often kept from the poor themselves ; and then the information we are in quest of is shut up with the giver in the silent consciousness of his own bosom, and with God in the book of his remembrance.

7. But much good has been done of late years by the combined exertions of individuals ; and be-

nevolence, when operating in this way, is necessarily exposed to public observation. Subscriptions have been started for almost every one object which benevolence can devise, and the published lists may furnish us with data for a partial solution of the proposed question. In point of fact, then, those who subscribe for a religious object, subscribe with the greatest readiness and liberality for the relief of human affliction, under all the various forms in which it pleads for sympathy. This is quite notorious. The human mind, by singling out the eternity of others as the main object of its benevolence, does not withdraw itself from the care of sustaining them on the way which leads to eternity. It exerts an act of preference, but not an act of exclusion. A friend of mine has been indebted to an active and beneficent patron for a lucrative situation in a distant country, but he wants money to pay his travelling expenses. I commit every reader to his own experience of human nature, when I rest with him the assertion, that if real kindness lay at the bottom of this act of patronage, the patron himself is the likeliest quarter from which the assistance will come. The man who signalizes himself by his religious charities, is not the last but the first man to whom I would apply in behalf of the sick and the destitute. The two principles are not inconsistent. They give support and nourishment to each other, or, rather,

they are exertions of the same principle. This will appear in full display on the day of judgment ; and even in this dark and undiscerning world, enough of evidence is before us, upon which the benevolence of the Christian stands nobly vindicated, and from which it may be shown, that, while its chief care is for the immortality of others, it casts a wide and a wakeful eye over all the necessities and sufferings of the species.

8. Nor have we far to look for the explanation. The two elements which combine to form an act of charity, are the ability and the disposition ; and the question simply resolves itself into this, “ In how far these elements will survive a donation to the Bible Society, so as to leave the other charities unimpaired by it ? It is certainly conceivable, that an individual may give every spare farthing of his income to this institution. In this case, there is a total extinction of the first element. But, in point of fact, this is never done, or done so rarely as not to be admitted into any general argument. With by far the greater number of subscribers, the ability is not sensibly encroached upon. There is no visible retrenchment in the superfluities of life. A very slight and partial change in the direction of that fund which is familiarly known by the name of *pocket-money*, can, generally speaking, provide for the whole amount of the donation in question. There are a thousand floating and incidental ex-

penses, which can be given up without almost the feeling of a sacrifice ; and the diversion of a few of them to the charity we are pleading for, leaves the ability of the giver to all sense as entire as before.

9. But the second element is subject to other laws, and the formal calculations of arithmetic do not apply to it. The disposition is not like the ability, a given quantity which suffers an abstraction by every new exercise. The effect of a donation upon the purse of the giver, is not the same with the moral influence of that donation upon his heart. Yet the two are assimilated by our antagonists ; and the pedantry of computation carries them to results which are in the face of all experience. It is not so easy to awaken the benevolent principle out of its sleep, as, when once awakened in behalf of one object, to excite and to interest it in behalf of another. When the bar of selfishness is broken down, and the flood-gates of the heart are once opened, the stream of beneficence can be turned into a thousand directions. It is true, that there can be no beneficence without wealth, as there can be no stream without water. It is conceivable, that the opening of the flood-gates may give rise to no flow, as the opening of the poor man's heart to the distresses of those around him may give rise to no act of almsgiving. But we have already proved the abundance of wealth ; (see 8.) It is the selfishness of the inaccessible heart which forms the

mighty barrier ; and if this could be done away, a thousand fertilising streams would issue from it. Now, this is what the Bible Society, in many instances, has accomplished. It has unlocked the avenue to many a heart, which was before inaccessible. It has come upon them with all the energy of a popular and prevailing impulse. It has created in them a new taste and a new principle. It has opened the fountain, and we are sure that, in every district of the land where a Bible Association exists, the general principle of benevolence is more active and more expanding than ever.

10. And after all, what is the best method of providing for the secular necessities of the poor ? Is it by labouring to meet the necessity after it has occurred, or by labouring to establish a principle and a habit which would go far to prevent its existence ? If you wish to get rid of a noxious stream, you may first try to intercept it by throwing across a barrier : but, in this way, you only spread the pestilential water over a greater extent of ground, and when the bason is filled, a stream as copious as before is formed out of its overflow. The most effectual method, were it possible to carry it into accomplishment, would be, to dry up the source. The parallel in a great measure holds. If you wish to extinguish poverty, combat with it in its first elements. If you confine your beneficence to the relief of actual poverty, you do nothing. Dry up,

if possible, the spring of poverty, for every attempt to intercept the running stream has totally failed. The education and the religious principle of Scotland have not annihilated pauperism, but they have restrained it to a degree that is almost incredible to our neighbours of the south: they keep down the mischief in its principle; they impart a sobriety and a right sentiment of independence to the character of our peasantry; they operate as a check upon profligacy and idleness. The maintenance of parish schools is a burden upon the landed property of Scotland, but it is a cheap defence against the poor-rates, a burden far heavier, and which is aggravating perpetually. The writer of this paper knows of a parish in Fife, the average maintenance of whose poor is defrayed by twenty-four pounds Sterling a year; and of a parish, of the same population, in Somersetshire, where the annual assessments come to thirteen hundred pounds Sterling. The preventive regimen of the one country does more than the positive applications of the other. In England, they have suffered poverty to rise to all the virulence of a formed and obstinate disease. But they may as well think of arresting the destructive progress of a torrent by throwing across an embankment, as think that the mere positive administration of relief will put a stop to the accumulating mischiefs of poverty.

11. The exemption of Scotland from the miser-

ies of pauperism, is due to the education which their people receive at schools, and to the Bible which their scholarship gives them access to. The man who subscribes to the divine authority of this simple saying, "If any would not work, neither should he eat," possesses, in the good treasure of his own heart, a far more effectual security against the hardships of indigence, than the man who is trained, by the legal provisions of his country, to sit in slothful dependence upon the liberalities of those around him. It is easy to be eloquent in the praise of those liberalities; but the truth is, that they may be carried to the mischievous extent of forming a depraved and beggarly population. The hungry expectations of the poor will ever keep pace with the assessments of the wealthy; and their eye will be averted from the exertion of their own industry, as the only right source of comfort and independence. It is quite in vain to think that positive relief will ever do away the wretchedness of poverty. Carry the relief beyond a certain limit, and you foster the diseased principle which gives birth to poverty. On this subject, the people of England feel themselves to be in a state of almost inextricable helplessness; and they are not without their fears of some mighty convulsion, which must come upon them with all the energy of a tempest, before this devouring mischief can be swept away from the face of their community.

12. If any thing can avert this calamity from England, it will be the education of their peasantry ; and this is a cause to which the Bible Society is contributing its full share of influence. A zeal for the circulation of the Bible is inseparable from a zeal for extending among the people the capacity of reading it ; and it is not to be conceived, that the very same individual can be eager for the introduction of this volume into our cottages, and sit inactive under the galling reflection, that it is still a sealed book to many thousands of the occupiers. Accordingly we find, that the two concerns are keeping pace with one another. The Bible Society does not overstep the simplicity of its assigned object ; but the members of that Society receive an impulse from the cause, which carries them to promote the education of the poor, either by their individual exertions, or by giving their support to the Society for Schools. The two Societies move in concert. Each contributes an essential element in the business of enlightening the people. The one furnishes the book of knowledge, and the other furnishes the key to it. This division of employment, as in every other instance, facilitates the work, and renders it more effective. But it does not hinder the same individual from giving his countenance to both ; and sure I am, that the man whose feelings have been already warmed, and whose purse has been already drawn

in behalf of the one, is a likelier subject for an application in behalf of the other, than he whose money is still untouched, but whose heart is untouched also.

13. It will be seen, then, that the Bible Society is not barely defensible, but may be pled for upon that ground on which its enemies have raised their opposition to it. Its immediate object is, neither to feed the hungry nor to clothe the naked ; but, in every country under the benefit of its exertions, here will be less hunger to feed, and less nakedness to clothe. It does not cure actual poverty, but it anticipates eventual poverty. It aims its decisive thrust at the heart and principle of the mischief ; and, instead of suffering it to form into the obstinacy of an inextirpable disease, it smothers and destroys it in the infancy of its first elements. The love which worketh no ill to his neighbour, will not suffer the true Christian to live in idleness upon another's bounty ; and he will do as Paul did before him ; he will labour with his hands rather than be burdensome. Could we reform the improvident habits of the people, and pour the healthful infusion of scripture principle into their hearts, it would reduce the existing poverty of the land to a very humble fraction of its present extent. We make bold to say, that, in ordinary times, there is not one-tenth of the pauperism of England due to unavoidable misfortune. It has grown out of a vicious and impolitic system ; and the millions which

are raised every year have only served to nourish and extend it. Now, the Bible Society is a prime agent in the work of counteracting this disorder. Its mode of proceeding carries in it all the cheapness and all the superior efficacy of a preventive operation. With a revenue not equal to the poor-rates of many a county, it is doing more even for the secular interests of the poor than all the charities of England united ; and while a puling and injudicious sympathy is pouring out its complaints against it, it is sowing the seeds of character and independence, and rearing, for future days, the spectacle of a thriving, substantial, and well-conditioned peasantry.

14. I have hitherto been supposing, that the rich only are the givers, but I now call on the poor to be sharers in this work of charity. It is true, that of these poor there are some who depend on charity for their subsistence, and these have no right to give what they receive from others. And there are some who have not arrived at this state of dependence, but are on the very verge of it. Let us keep back no part of the truth from them, " If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." There are others, again, and these I apprehend form by far the most numerous class of society, who can maintain themselves in humble but honest independence, who

can spare a little, and not feel it; who can do what Paul advises,* lay aside their penny a-week as God hath prospered them; who can share that blessedness which the Saviour spoke of when he said, It was more blessed to give than to receive; who, though they cannot equal their richer neighbours in the amount of their donation, can bestow their something, and can, at all events, carry in their bosom a heart as warm to the cause, and call down as precious a blessing from the God who witnesses it. The Bible Society is opposed on the ground of its diverting a portion of relief from the secular necessities of the poor, even when the rich only are called upon to support it. When the application for support is brought down to the poor themselves, and, instead of the recipients, it is proposed to make them the dispensers of charity, we may lay our account with the opposition being still more clamorous. We undertake to prove, that this opposition is founded on a fallacy, and that, by interesting the great mass of a parish in the Bible Society, and assembling them into a penny association for the support of it, you raise a defence against the extension of pauperism.

15. We feel a difficulty in this undertaking, not from any uncertainty which hangs over the principle, but from the difficulty of bringing forward a

* 1 Corinthians xvi. 2.

plain and popular exhibition of it. However familiar the principle may be to a student of political science, it carries in it an air of paradox to the multitude, and it were well if this air of paradox were the only obstacle to its reception. But to the children of poesy and fine sentiment, the principle in question carries in it an air of barbarity also, and all the rigour of a pure and impregnable argument has not been able to protect the conclusions of Malthus from their clamorous indignation. There is a kind of hurrying sensibility about them, which allows neither time nor temper for listening to any calculation on the subject, and there is not a more striking vanity under the sun, than that the substantial interests of the poor have suffered less from the malignant and the unfeeling, than from those who give without wisdom, and who feel without consideration ;

Blessed is he that *wisely* doth
The poor man's case *consider*,

16. Let me put the case of two parishes, in the one of which there is a known and public endowment, out of which an annual sum is furnished for the maintenance of the poor ; and that in the other there is no such endowment. At the outset, the poor of the first parish may be kept in greater comfort than the poor of the second ; but it is the lesson of all experience, that no annual sum, however

great, will be able to keep them permanently in greater comfort. The certain effect of an established provision for the poor is, a relaxation of their economical habits, and an increased number of improvident marriages. When their claim to a provision is known, that claim is always counted upon, and it were well, if to flatter their natural indolence, they did not carry the calculation beyond the actual benefit they can ever receive. But this is what they always do. When a public charity is known and counted upon, the relaxation of frugal and providential habits is carried to such an extent, as not only to absorb the whole produce of the charity, but to leave new wants unprovided for, and the effect of the benevolent institution is just to create a population more wretched and more clamorous than ever.

17. In the second parish, the economical habits of the people are kept unimpaired, and just because their economy is forced to take a higher aim, and to persevere in it. The aim of the first people is, to provide for themselves a part of their maintenance: The aim of the second people is, to provide for themselves their whole maintenance. We do not deny, that even among the latter we will meet with distress and poverty, just such distress and such poverty as are to be found in the average of Scottish parishes. This finds its alleviation in private benevolence. To alleviate poverty is all that can

be done for it : To extinguish it we fear is hopeless. Sure we are, that the known and regular provisions of England will never extinguish it, and that, in respect of the poor themselves, the second parish is under a better system than the first. The poor-rates are liable to many exceptions, but there is none of them more decisive with him who cares for the eternity of the poor, than the temptation they hold out to positive guilt, the guilt of not working with their own hands, and so becoming burdensome to others.*

18. Let us conceive a political change in the circumstances of the country, and that the public charity of the first parish fell among the ruin of other institutions. Then its malignant influence would be felt in all its extent ; and it would be seen, that it, in fact, had impoverished those whom it professed to sustain, that it had stript them of a possession far more valuable than all it had ever given ; that it had stript them of industrious habits, and left those whom its influence never reached wealthier in the resources of their own superior industry, than the artificial provisions of an unwise and meddling benevolence could ever make them.

19. The comparison betwixt these two parishes paves the way for another comparison. Let me now put the case of a third parish, where a Bible

* Acts xx. 35. 1 Timothy v. 8.

Association is instituted, and where the simple regulation of a penny a-week throws it open to the bulk of the people. What effect has this upon their economical habits? It just throws them at a greater distance from the thriftlessness which prevails in the first parish, and leads them to strike a higher aim in the way of economy than the people of the second. The general aim of economy, in humble life, is to keep even with the world; but it is known to every man at all familiar with that class of society, that the great majority may strike their aim a little higher, and, in point of fact, have it in their power to redeem an annual sum from the mere squanderings of mismanagement and carelessness. The unwise provisions in the first parish, have had the effect of sinking the income of the poor below their habits of expenditure, and they are brought, permanently and irrecoverably brought, into a state of pauperism. In the second parish, the income, generally speaking, is even with the habits of expenditure. In the third, the income is above the habits of expenditure, and above it by the annual sum contributed to the Bible Society. The circumstance of being members to such a Society, throws them at a greater distance from pauperism than if they had not been members of it.

20. The effect on the economical habits of the people would just be the same in whatever way the stated annual sum was obtained from them, even

though a compulsory tax were the instrument of raising it.* This assimilation of our plan to a tax, may give rise to a world of impetuous declamation; but let it ever be remembered, that the institution of a Bible Society gives you the whole benefit of such a tax, without its odiousness. It brings up their economy to a higher pitch; but it does so, not in the way which they resist, but in the way which they choose. The single circumstance of its being a *voluntary* act, forms the defence and the answer to all the clamours of an affected sympathy. You take from the poor. No! they give.—You take beyond their ability. Of this they are the best judges.—You abridge their comforts! No! there is a comfort in the exercise of charity: there is a comfort in the act of lending a hand to a noble enterprise; there is a comfort in the contemplation of its progress; there is a comfort in rendering a service to a friend, and when that friend is the Saviour, and that service the circulation of the message he left behind him, it is a comfort which many of the poor are ambitious to share in. Leave them to judge of their comfort; and if, in point of fact, they do give their penny a-week to a Bible Society, it just speaks them to have more

* I must here suppose the sum to be a stated one, and a feeling of security on the part of the people, that the tax shall not be subject to variation, at the caprice of an arbitrary government.

comfort in this way of spending it, than in another which occurs to them.

21. Perhaps it does not occur to those friends of the poor, while they are sitting in judgment on the circumstances and feelings, how unjustly and how unworthily they think of them. They do not conceive how truth and benevolence can be at all objects to them, and suppose, that after they have got the meat to feed, the house to shelter, the raiment to cover them, there is nothing else that they will bestow a penny upon. They may not be able to express their feelings on a suspicion so ungenerous but I shall do it for them : “ We have souls as well as you, and precious to our hearts is the Saviour who died for them. It is true, we have our distresses, but these have bound us more firmly to our Bibles, and it is the desire of our hearts, that a gift so precious should be sent to the poor of other countries. The word of God is our hope and our rejoicing ; we desire that it may be theirs also, that the wandering savage may know it and be glad, and the poor negro, under the lash of his master, may be told of a Master in heaven, who is full of pity and full of kindness. Do you think that sympathy for such as these is your peculiar attribute ? Know, that our hearts are made of the same materials with your own ; that we can feel as well as you ; and out of the earnings of a hard and an honest industry, we shall give an offering to the

cause; nor shall we cease our exertions till the message of salvation be carried round the globe, and made known to the countless millions who live in guilt, and who die in darkness."

22. And here it is obvious, that a superior habit of economy is not the only defence which the Bible Society raises against pauperism. The smallness of the sum contributed may give a littleness to this argument; but not, let it be remembered, without giving an equal littleness to the objection of those who declaim against the institution, on the ground of its oppressiveness to the poor contributors. The great defence which such a Society establishes against pauperism, is the superior tone of dignity and independence which it imparts to the character of him who supports it. He stands on the high ground of being a dispenser of charity; and before he can submit to become a recipient of charity, he must let himself farther down than a poor man in ordinary circumstances. To him the transition will be more violent; and the value of this principle will be acknowledged by all who perceive that it is reluctance on the part of the poor man to become a pauper, which forms the mighty barrier against the extension of pauperism. A man, by becoming the member of a benevolent association, puts himself into the situation of a giver. He stands at a greater distance than before from the situation of a receiver. He

has a wider interval to traverse before he can reach this point. He will feel it a greater degradation ; and to save himself from it, he will put forth all his powers of frugality and exertion. The idea of restraining pauperism by external administrations seems now to be generally abandoned. But could we thus enter into the hearts of the poor, we would get in at the root of the mischief, and by fixing there a habit of economy and independence, more would be done for them, than by all the liberalities of all the opulent.

23. In those districts of Scotland where poor-rates are unknown, the descending avenue which leads to pauperism is powerfully guarded by the stigma which attaches to it. Remove this stigma, and our cottagers, now 'rich in the possession of contentment and industry, would resign their habits, and crowd into the avenue by thousands. The shame of descending, is the powerful stimulus which urges them to contest it manfully with the difficulties of their situation, and which bears them through in all the pride of honest independence. Talk of this to the people of the South, and it sounds in their ears like an Arcadian story. But there is not a clergyman amongst us who has not witnessed the operation of the principle in all its fineness, and in all its moral delicacy ; and surely a testimony is due to those village heroes who so nobly struggle with the difficulties of pau-

perism, that they may shun and surmount its degradation.

24. A Bible Association gives additional vigour and buoyancy to this elevated principle. The trifle which it exacts from its contributor is, in truth, never missed by him ; but it puts him in the high attitude of a giver, and every feeling which it inspires is on the side of independence and delicacy. Go over each of these feelings separately, and you find that they are all fitted to fortify his dislike at the shame and dependence of pauperism. There is a consciousness of importance which unavoidably attaches to the share he has taken in the support and direction of a public charity. There is the expanding effect of the information which comes to him through the medium of the circulating Reports, which lays before him the mighty progress of an institution reaching to all countries, and embracing in its ample grasp, the men of all latitudes and all languages, which deeply interests him in the object, and perpetuates his desire of promoting it. A man with his heart so occupied, and his attention so directed, is not capable of a voluntary descent to pauperism. He has, in fact, become a more cultivated and intellectual being than formerly. His mind gathers an enlargement from the wide and animating contemplations which are set before him, and we appeal to the reflection of every reader, if such a man will descend as rea-

dily to a dependence on the charity of others, as he whose mind is void of information, and whose feelings are void of dignity.

25. In such associations, the rich and the poor meet together. They share in one object, and are united by the sympathy of one feeling, and of one interest. We have not to look far into human nature to be convinced of the happy and the harmonising influence which this must have upon society; and how, in the glow of one common cordiality, all asperity and discontent must give way to the kindlier principles of our nature. The days have been, when the very name of an association carried terror and suspicion along with it. In a Bible Association there is nothing which our rulers need to be afraid of; and they may rest assured, that the moral influence of such institutions is all on the side of peace and loyalty. But to confine myself to the present argument. Who does not see that they exalt the general tone and character of our people; that they bring them nearer to the dignity of superior and cultivated life; and that, therefore, though their direct aim is not to mitigate poverty, they go a certain way to dry up the most abundant of its sources?

26. Let me add, that the direct influence of Bible principles is inseparable from a zeal for the circulation of the Bible. It is not to be conceived, that anxiety for sending it to others can ex-

ist, while there is no reverence for it among ourselves; and we appeal to those districts where such associations have been formed, if a more visible attention to the Bible, and a more serious impression of its authority, is not the consequence of them. Now the lessons of this Bible are all on the side of industry. They tell us; that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and that therefore, a man who, by his own voluntary idleness, is brought under the necessity of receiving, has disinherited himself of a blessing. The poor must have bread, but the Bible commands and exhorts, that wherever it is possible, that bread should be *their own*, and that all who are able should make it their own by working for it.* No precept can be devised which bears more directly on the source of pauperism. The minister who, in his faithful exposition of the Bible, urged this precept successfully upon his people, would do much to extinguish pauperism amongst them. It is true, that he does not always urge successfully; but surely if success is to be more looked for in one quarter than in another, it is among the pious and intelligent peasantry whom he has assembled around him, whom he has formed into a little society for the circulation of the Bible, and whose feelings

* 2 Thes. iii. 12.

he has interested in this purest and worthiest of causes.

27. Nor is the operation of this principle confined to the actual contributor. We have no doubt that it has been beautifully exemplified even among those, who, unable to give their penny a week, either stand on the very verge of pauperism, or have got within its limits. They are unable to give any thing of their own, but they may be able at the same time to forego the wonted allowance which they received from another, or a part of it. The refusals of the poor to take an offered charity, or to take the whole amount of the offer, are quite familiar to a Scottish clergyman; and the plea on which they set the refusal, that it would be taking from others who are even needier than they, entitles them, when honestly advanced, to all the praise of benevolence. A spirit of pious attachment to the Bible would prompt a refusal of the same kind. You have other and higher claims upon you—you have the spiritual necessities of the world to provide for, and, that you may be the more able to make the provision, leave me to the frugality of my own management. In this way the principle descends, and carries its healthful influence into the very regions of pauperism. It is the only principle competent to its extirpation. The obvious expedient of a positive supply,

to meet the wants of existing poverty, has failed, and the poor rates of England will ever be a standing testimony to the utter inefficiency of this expedient, which, instead of killing the disease, has rooted and confirmed it. Try the other expedient, then. The remedy against the extension of pauperism does not lie in the liberalities of the rich. It lies in the hearts and habits of the poor. Plant in their bosoms a principle of independence. Give a higher tone of delicacy to their characters. Teach them to recoil from pauperism as a degradation. The degradation may at times be unavoidable; but the thing which gives such alarming extent to the mischief, is the debasing influence of poor rates, whereby, in the vast majority of instances, the degradation is voluntary. But if there be an exalting influence in Bible Associations to counteract this; if they foster a right spirit of importance; above all, if they secure a readier submission to the lessons of the volume which they are designed to circulate, who does not see, that in proportion as they are multiplied and extended over the face of the country, they carry along with them the most effectual regimen for preventing the extension of poverty?

28. And here it may be asked, if it be at all likely that these Associations will extend to such a degree, as to have a sensible influence upon the

habits of the country? Nothing more likely. A single individual of influence in each parish, would make the system universal. In point of fact, it is making progress every month; and such is the wonderful spirit of exertion which is now abroad, that in a few years every little district of the land may become the seat of a Bible Society. We are now upon the dawn of very high anticipations; and the wholesome effect upon the habits and principles of the people at home, is not the least of them. That part of the controversy which relates to the direct merits of the Bible Society, may be looked upon as already exhausted;* and could the objection, founded on its interference with the relief of the poor, be annihilated, or still more, could it be converted into a positive argument in its behalf, we are not aware of a single remaining plea, upon which a rational or benevolent man can refuse his concurrence to it.

29. And the plea of conceived injury to the poor deserves to be attended to. It wears an amiable complexion, and we believe, that, in some

* See Dealtry's Pamphlets. Letter from the late Dr. Murray, Professor of Hebrew in the University of Edinburgh, to Dr. Charles Stuart. Steinkopff's Tour on the Continent. Edinburgh Review, vol. xix. p. 39; and, above all, the Reports and Summaries of the Institution itself, where you will meet with a cloud of testimonies from Moravians, Missionaries, Roman Catholics, the literati of our chief European towns, and men of piety and public spirit in all quarters of the world.

instances, a real sympathy with their distresses lies at the bottom of it. Let sympathy be guided by consideration. It is the part of a Christian to hail benevolence in all its forms; but when a plan is started for the relief of the destitute, is he to be the victim of a popular and sentimental indignation, because he ventures to take up the question whether the plan be really an effective one? We know, that in various towns of Scotland, you meet with two distinct Penny Societies, one a Bible Association, the other for the relief of the indigent. It is to be regretted, that there should ever be any jealousy betwixt them; but we believe, that, agreeably to what we have already said, it will often be found, that the one suggested the other, and that the supporters of the former, are the most zealous, and active, and useful friends of the latter. We cannot however suppress the fact, that there is now a growing apprehension lest the growth of the latter Societies should break down the delicacies of the lower orders, and pave the way for a permanent introduction of poor rates. There is a pretty general impression, that the system may be carried too far; and the uncertainty as to the precise limit, has given the feeling to many, who embarked with enthusiasm, that they are now engaged in a ticklish and questionable undertaking. I do not attempt either to confirm or to refute this impression, but I account it a

piece of justice to the associations I am pleading for, to assert, that they stand completely free of every such exception. The Bible Society is making steady advances towards the attainment of its object, and the sure effect of multiplying its subscribers, is to conduct it in a shorter time to the end of its labours. A Society for the relief of temporal necessities, is grasping at an object that is completely unattainable; and the mischief is, that the more known, and the more extensive, and the more able it becomes, it is sure to be more counted on, and at last to create more poverty than it provides for. The Bible Society aims at making every land a land of Bibles, and this aim it will accomplish, after it has translated the Bible into all languages, and distributed a sample large enough to create a native and universal demand for them.* After the people of the world have acquired such a taste for the Bible, and such a sense of its value, as to purchase it for themselves, the Society terminates in its career; and, instead of the corruptions and abuses which other charities scatter in their way, it leaves the poor to whom it gives, more enlightened, and the

* But this native demand never will be created without the exertion of Missionaries; and the above reasoning applies, in its most important parts, to Missionary Associations. See *Appendix*.

poor from whom it takes, more elevated than it found them.

30. "Charity," says Shakespeare, "is twice blest. It blesses him who gives, and him who takes." This is far from being universally true. There is a blessing annexed to the heart which deviseth liberal things. Perhaps the founder of the English poor rates acquired this blessing; but the indolence and depravity which they have been the instrument of spreading over the face of the country, are incalculable. If we wish to see the assertion of the Poet realised in its full extent, go to such a charity as we are now pleading for, where the very exercise of giving on the one hand, and the instruction received on the other, have the effect of narrowing the limits of pauperism, by creating a more virtuous and dignified population.

31. There is poverty to be met with in every land, and we are ready to admit, that a certain proportion of it is due to unavoidable misfortune. But it is no less true, that in those countries where there is a known and established provision for the necessities of the poor, the greater proportion of the poverty which exists in them is due to the debasing influence of a public charity on the habits of the people. The institution we are pleading for counteracts this influence. It does not annihilate all poverty, but it tends to annihilate.

the greater part of it. It arrests the progress of the many who were making a voluntary descent to pauperism, and it leaves none to be provided for but the few who have honestly struggled against their distresses, and have struggled in vain.

32. And how shall they be provided for? You may erect a public institution. This, in fact, is the same with erecting a signal of invitation, and the voluntary and self-created poor will rush in, to the exclusion of those modest and unobtrusive poor who are the genuine objects of charity. This is the never-failing mischief of a known and established provision,* and it has been sadly exemplified in England. The only method of doing away the mischief is to confide the relief of the poor to individual benevolence. This draws no dependence along with it. It is not counted upon like a public and proclaimed charity. It brings the claims of the poor under the discriminating eye of a neighbour, who will make a difference betwixt a case of genuine helplessness, and a case of idleness or misconduct. It turns the tide of benevolence into its true channel, and it will ever be

* We must here except all those institutions, the object of which is to provide for voluntary distress, such as hospitals and dispensaries, and asylums for the lunatic or the blind. A man may resign himself to idleness, and become wilfully poor, that he may eat of the public bread; but he will not become wilfully sick or maimed, that he may receive medicines from a dispensary, or undergo an operation in an hospital.

found, that under its operation, the poverty of misfortune is better seen to, and the poverty of improvidence and guilt is more effectually prevented.

33. My concluding observation then is, that the extension of Bible Societies, while it counteracts in various directions the mischief of poor rates, augments that principle of individual benevolence which is the best substitute for poor rates. You add to the stock of individual benevolence, by adding to the number of benevolent individuals; and this is the genuine effect of a Bible Association. Or, you add to the stock of individual benevolence in a country, by adding to the intensity of the benevolent principle; and this is the undoubted tendency of a Bible Association.* And, what is of mighty importance in this argument, a Bible Association not only awakens the benevolent principle, but it enlightens it. It establishes an intercourse betwixt the various orders of society; and, on no former occasion in the history of this country, have the rich and the poor come so often together upon a footing of good will. The kindly influence of this is incalculable. It brings the poor under the eye of their richer neighbours. The visits and inquiries connected with the objects of the Bible Society, bring them into con-

* See 9.

tact with one another. The rich come to be more skilled in the wants and difficulties of the poor; and, by entering their houses, and joining with them in conversation, they not only acquire a benevolence towards them, but they gather that knowledge which is so essential to guide and enlighten their benevolence. *

* There never perhaps was so minute and statistical a survey taken of the Poor Families in London, as by the friends and agents of the Bible Society. That this survey has given rise to many deeds of secular benevolence, I do not know from any positive information; but I assert it upon the confidence I repose in the above principles, and am willing to risk upon this assertion, the credit of the whole argument.

APPENDIX.

It is evident, that the above reasoning applies, in its chief parts, to benevolent Associations instituted for any other religious purpose. It is not necessary to restrict the argument to the case of Bible Associations. I should be sorry if the Bible Society were to engross the religious benevolence of the public, and if, in the multiplication of its auxiliaries over the face of the country, it were to occupy the whole ground, and leave no room for the great and important claims of other institutions.

Of this I conceive that there is little danger. The revenue of each of these Societies is founded upon voluntary contributions, and what is voluntary may be withdrawn or transferred to other objects. I may give both to a Bible and a Missionary Society; or, if I can only afford to give to one, I may select either, according to my impression of their respective claims. In this way a vigilant and discerning public will suit its benevolence to the urgency of the case, and it is evident that each institution can employ the same methods for obtaining patronage and support. Each can, and does bring forward a yearly statement of its claims and necessities. Each has the same access to the public, through the medium of the pulpit or the press. Each can send its advocates over

the face of the country; and every individual, forming his own estimate of their respective claims, will apportion his benevolence accordingly.

Now what is done by an individual, may be done by every such Association as I am now pleading for. Its members may sit in judgment on the various schemes of utility which are now in operation; and, though originally formed as an auxiliary to the Bible Society, it may keep itself open to other calls, and occasionally give of its funds to Missionaries, or Moravians, or the Society for Gaelic Schools, or the African Institution, or to the Jewish, and Baptist, and Hibernian, and Lancasterian Societies.

In point of fact, the subordinate Associations of the country are tending towards this arrangement, and it is a highly beneficial arrangement. It carries in it a most salutary controul over all these various institutions, each labouring to maintain itself in reputation with the public, and to secure the countenance of this great patron. Indolence and corruption may lay hold of an endowed charity, but when the charity depends upon public favour, a few glaring examples of mismanagement would annihilate it.

During a few of the first years of the Bible Society, the members of other Societies were alarmed at the rapid extension of its popularity, and expressed their fears lest it should engross all the attention and benevolence of the religious public. But the reverse has happened, and a principle made use of in the body of this pamphlet may be well illustrated by the history of this matter.* The Bible Society has drawn a great yearly sum of money from the public; and the first impression was, that it would exhaust the fund for religious

* See 2,

charities. But while it drew money from the hand, it sent a fresh and powerful excitement of Christian benevolence into the heart ; and, under the influence of this creative principle, the fund has extended to such a degree, as not only to meet the demands of the new Society, but to yield a more abundant revenue to the older Societies than ever. We believe, that the excitement goes much farther than this, and that many a deed of ordinary charity could be traced to the impulse of the cause we are pleading for. We hazard the assertion, that many thousands of those who contribute to the Bible Society, find in themselves a greater readiness to every good work,* since the period of their connection with it, and that in the wholesome channel of individual benevolence, more hunger is fed, and more nakedness clothed, throughout the land, than at any period anterior to the formation of our Religious Societies.

The alarm, grounded upon the tendency of these Societies, with their vast revenues, to impoverish the country, is ridiculous. If ever their total revenue shall amount to a sum which can make it worthy of consideration to an enlightened economist at all, it may be proved that it trenches upon no national interest whatever ; that it leaves population and Public Revenue on precisely the same footing of extent and prosperity in which it found them ; and that it interferes with no one object which Patriot or Politician needs to care for. In the mean time it may suffice to state, that the Income of all the Bible and Missionary Societies in the Island, would not do more than defray the annual maintenance of one Ship of the Line. When put by the side of the millions which are lavished without a sigh, on the enterprises of war, it is no-

* Titus iii. 1.

thing; and shall this veriest trifle be grudged to the advancement of a cause, which, when carried to its accomplishment, will put an end to war, and banish all its passions and atrocities from the world?

I should be sorry if Penny Associations were to bind themselves down to the support of the Bible Society. I should like to see them exercising a judgment over the numerous claims which are now before the public, and giving occasionally of their funds to other religious institutions. The effect of this very exercise would be to create a liberal and well-informed peasantry; to open a wider sphere to their contemplations; and to raise the standard, not merely of piety, but of general intelligence amongst them. The diminution of pauperism is only part of the general effect which the multiplication of these Societies will bring about in the country; and if my limits allowed me, I might expatiate on their certain influence in raising the tone and character of the British Population.*

* It is thought by some that the assumption of the title "Bible Association," carries in it an obligation to devote all the funds to the Bible Society. The title may easily be modified so as to leave the most entire liberty to every Association to give of its funds to any Religious Society whatever.

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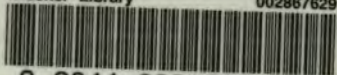
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